

“corporations and nonprofit groups, in addition to individuals, should be allowed to run for office in local elections....Such firms as KPMG , Ernst & Young, or McKinsey should all get a shot at becoming candidates to run cities and districts with a history of corruption.” While I believe that such a solution is unlikely, I think it is exactly the wrong prescription, as putting any for-profit entities in charge of governments at any level would compound the danger of the motivational problem I discussed above. As Woodrow Wilson said to a group of students:

You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.

Individual and Group Self-Interest vs The Public Interest in American Society

That very same imperialism in behalf of self-interest that characterizes the dominant motivation of those in the for-profit sector has also corrupted public consciousness in American society as a whole. American society, therefore, confronts an ever-increasing problem in the unwillingness of Americans to govern, that is to limit, their own wants, that is themselves, their desires. Everyone wants to “grab for all the gusto they can get.”

Democracy, properly understood, is not only about EXPRESSING one’s individual and group wants. It is also very much about balance in RESTRAINING one’s self-seeking in the interest of others in society, in other words in the public interest as a whole. Democracy, as President Kennedy famously pointed out, is not only about what our country—that is our society—does for us, but what we are obliged and expected to do for our country. In fact, we use the term “self-government” in two different senses. Self-government is a superb democratic